What is Theory & Why its use in Research Proposal is important

(Aamir Cheema Ph.D Scholar (Area Study Centre). End term assignment for Dr Shafi Afridi)

Abstract. *Theory is the most widely used term among the scholarly world and perhaps the most debated as well. One key reason is the duplicity in etymology among natural and social sciences. However, theory is paramount and vital for any research, it provides basic lens to observe the phenomenon. In this paper , which is in three parts, theory has been discussed and than a prototype research proposal has been made*. APA 7th edition has been used.

Keywords. Theory. Theoretical framework. research proposal.

Introduction.

Theory is among the most widely use term among academia and perhaps the most misunderstood as well (Babbie 2021, Garver 2016, Swedberg 2014, Parson, 1938). Part of this confusion is rooted in the etymology. Theory is a Greek word which entered into English language in 14th century. To Greeks, theoria, theory and theorising all meant ' to contemplate 'and it was different from word philosophy , which they used for, 'to seek knowledge'. Historically the basis of our present scholarly world stands on the shoulders of philosophers. Philosophy was the main branch of knowledge from ancient ear till 1800. Works of Confucius, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Ibn Khaldun, Machiavelli, they all are regarded as philosophers and not as theorists. Auguste Comte in 1840s drastically changed this concept of philosophy by introducing and emphasizing on the use of scientific measurement and instrument to the social life thus from 1850 onwards the philosophy was divided into two main branches the objective which relied upon the figures and language of mathematics and the subjective which adhered to the interpretation of life and events in a subjective manner (Lovesay, 2014). The concept of theory was thus born in the shadow of natural science and the term became ever increasing. (Stolley,2005. Parson,1938. Lovesay,2014.).

'It is only in the 1800s that we begin to find thinkers who can be clearly identified as sociologists. These are the classical sociological thinkers…By classical sociological theory we

mean theories of great scope and ambition that either were created during sociology's classical age in Europe (roughly the early 1800s through the early 1900s) or had their roots in that period and culture.' (Ritzer &Stepninsky, 2018, p-26).

Thus theories of Rousseu (1712-1778), Montesquieu (1689-1755) Kant (1724-1804) Hegel (1770-1831) Adam Smith (1723-1790) Comte (1798-1857), Durkheim (1858-1917), Karl Marx (1818-1883), Nietzche (1844-1900) Freud (1856-1939) Weber (1864-1920) Spencer (1820-1903) Darwin (1809-1903) Mead (1863-1931) Parson (1902-1979) Gramsci (1902-1932) and Lukarcs (1885-1971) are regarded as the classical theories of sociology. Each one of these great philosophers works have become a social paradigm; through which the theories operate. Thus Marx' paradigm of conflict in a society is based upon class conflict and many theories thereby takes their starting point or assumption from this conflict paradigm.

What is a Theory**?**. Various thinkers have tried to explain the Theory including Kenneth Waltz (1979), to him; theories are set or collection of laws pertaining to a particular behaviour or phenomenon. He also noted that students of international relations often use term theory freely; to describe any work which departs from mere description and seldom use the term to refer to any work which meets the requirement of philosophy of science standards. It has been stressed at almost in all major universities that so far there is no consensus on the meaning of theory; correct understanding of the theory has also been fiercely debated. (Joas & Knob,2004). The core issue is the almost identical reproduction of scientific theory as a social theory; thus the on-going debate is whether the same precision of science can be implemented in social theory also.

For the purpose of this paper theory is defined as the Social Theory (theory), a social theory is different from the a scientific theory is the sense that whereas a scientific theory deals with things which are void of life and thinking, a social theory focus and concerns about living , it may focus on an individual or on a group or on an organisation or state, relations between states and henceforth but fundamentally it is a study of humans and their interactions either with fellow humans or animals or the material things yet at the core is the human. A theory differs from philosophy in the sense that theory relies upon verification or falsification, moreover theory is driven by the empirical data rather than intuition. Theory is imbedded in a paradigm and has certain boundary limits in terms of geographical and time period. (Babbie, 2021).

Classification of theory

Theory is classified in terms of its scope , thus theories concerning large groups are termed as Meta Theory or Macro Theory , Marx theory of conflict, Simmel theory of interaction, Parson theory of structuralism, Mead theory on functionalism all are macro theories. Micro Theory is focus on small groups and limited in terms of boundary and time. (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Theory should explain as why things occur, the way they occurred rather than mere collection of data. This interpretation of data is either idiographic; in which only one event is explained in idiosyncratic details. Nomothetic theory on the other hand explains a class of acts a combination of events. Nomothetic theories as compared to idiographic are less precise. (Babbie, p-19).

Components of Theory

A rational question that arises is that what is the difference between a normal statement and a theory? or what can be termed as a theory ? is it mere writing of a book and classifying it as a theory ?. Scholars such as Babbie, Bhattacherjee have laid down certain pre-requisites which must be considered as building blocks of a theory; they are constructs; which are abstract notions like war, peace, progress, harmony, poverty and so on. This is infact the philosophical block of the theory. These abstract or philosophical notions has to be operationalized or given a measurement on which they can be represented empirically or mathematically. For instance poverty has to be defined in terms of daily wage of such and such amount in rupees. Once these constructs are represented in measurable manner they became variables.

Proposition establishes the relationship between the constructs. Thus proposition ‘democracy brings peace in a nation’. ‘Rule of law causes economy to grow’ ‘pornography increases the rates of crimes against women’. These are few of the examples of proposition, the thing to note is that these are all constructs and they have to be operationalized in order to be measured.

Hypothesis. When the constructs are reduced to measurable meanings they then become ‘Variables’. Democracy can be operationalized as elections, rule of law as constitution, pornography as obscenity, crimes as rape and so on. A relationship is thus established between the variables, where it is hypothesized that if variable A is increased then variable B will also

increase/decrease. or cause and effect, this is the second building block of a theory. This relationship is known as Hypothesis and it is must that it must be testable (Popper,1935/2005, pp. 57-74). Above all a theory must have assumption or ontology, it should state the time, boundary limit or the limitations of the theory. Assumptions are to a great extent either makes or break a theory. The explanatory aspect of theory is entirely based upon the assumption of the scholar or in other words the social constructions of the theorist. Assumptions are also known as Axiom (Scott, 2014).

For instance a theory which has emerged from studying the pattern of female students of tribal area in a modern city educational institution, has to have the limitation of when it was observed, who were observed and the key assumption whether they are introvert by nature or extrovert. Thus the findings are restricted to the female students of Waziristan tribal areas of Pakistan studying at Peshawar University and it is not applicable on similar students of tribal areas in Morocco or in USA.

Assumptions are thus interpretive in nature, a person who has not served in military can only assume what it is like or a person not being a scholar in a university can only have an assumption of a university. Moreover a student of an American university can have the assumption of what he has seen and have no idea about a university in Pakistan tribal areas. There are five types of assumptions namely, universal, based upon theories, common sense assumption, assumptions backed by evidence known as warranted and unwarranted assumptions.

Formation of Theory

This process of formulating a theory is either inductive or deductive in nature. Inductive research is based upon observed data and as such is known as theory building. Deductive research is more to test an existing theory basing upon new empirical data thus it is known as theory testing. (Bhattacharjee, 2014).

If the entire process has been initiated by the observation of above average grades by tribal females in Peshawar University master degree programme involving 180 students in year 2020, then the findings will emerge as a hypothesis. After repeated tests between 2021-2024, if the findings still remains the same then hypothesis is passed or verified and a micro level idiographic theory will emerge. This is inductive theory. On the other hand if after some time the

results of the tribal female students starts declining then the research which will be carried out will be deductive in nature as it will be bringing the changes into the original theory yet the basic parameters of constructs and variables remains identical.

A theory is not just collection of data, rather it is the explanation as why the female students from tribal areas have been able to score above average marks as compare to the similar students from settled areas which makes it a theory. This explanation has to be logical and explanatory in nature. The social construction of the observer is the paramount factor and is restricted in term of time and space (Jaccard & Jacoby 2020, p-8)

Evaluation of a Theory

A theory is evaluated on certain criteria (Abend, 2008. Bhattacharjee, 2016), foremost is its logical consistency. This implies that the concepts, constructs, proposition, operationalization, and the relation between them, causal effect thus cause before the effect; all are logical and rational.

Explanatory power is another essential attribute of a good theory, if it can explain the phenomena in a parsimonious manner (using minimum or fewer variables) and also retains the element of falsifiability. (it can be proven wrong)

Theoretical Framework. (TF)

Theoretical framework also suffers like theory; an ongoing debate regarding its meaning, to some scholars there is no difference between TF and conceptual framework (CF). Also there is a difference among scholars regarding what is to be included in TF.(Adom, Hussein,& Agyum,2018). ‘The theoretical framework must demonstrate an understanding of theories and concepts that are relevant to the topic of your research paper and that relate to the broader areas of knowledge being considered’. (University of Southern California, 2024).

Thus TF is an interpretation of what other scholars have stated about the construct and concept which a scholar intends to research. It incorporates both inductive and deductive theories. Theoretical Framework synthesis both the theoretical and empirical planes.

Part II. Use of Theory in proposed research proposal

Problem Statement

As the observation is the basic brick of social research thus it has been observed that there has been no war among the five Central Asian Republics since their formation in 1990. This is rather a unique phenomenon as in last thirty five years countries like India-Pakistan, Russia, USA, NATO, (which includes 32 countries of Europe) many countries in Africa like Sudan and even in Europe the republics which gained independence in same time period as CARs like Bosnia, Slovakia have been in a state of war. Similarly there has been war among former soviet republics like Georgia and Armenia.

Research Questions

1. Why there has been no war among the Central Asian Republics either among themselves and neither with their neighbours?
2. What are the causes of peace among Central Asian Republics since their independence in 1990?

.Literature review

To find the answer to research questions a literature review is carried out , with an aim that perhaps there are scholars who might have carried out the research on the same line . Literature review highlights that no such research has been conducted either in Area Study Centre, Peshawar University or in any of the Pakistani universities. There has been an extensive research on Central Asia in terms of its culture, politics, economy, and history among the global scholars yet there is no evidence of any focused research on this particular phenomena.

CARs have issues and conflicts among themselves over water resources, there have been ethnic violence among them, economic disparity is also there with certain republics being richer than others. Politically they are democratic yet they are autocratic in nature. There have been

instances of violence among them, yet none of the republics has ever issued official announcement of war. These CARs have small standing armies, being landlocked they do not have regular navy and they have limited number of aircraft. Only Tajikistan have foreign troops (Russia) on its soil. All republics have constitution; there has been no instance of military coup among them.

Theoretical Framework. (Theory of Democratic Peace)

Immanuel Kant put forward the axiom or the theory that peace can exist between the democratic states (Kant, 1795/2003) To, Kant , it was important that for peace a state must have republican constitution and there should be no army within the state. The basic assumption or ontology of Kant is based upon the proposition that people if they are involved in the affairs of the state, then they will oppose war .

Michael Doyle based his theory on Kant's 'perpetual peace'. Doyle in his two-part article *Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs* (1983) put forward the **Democratic Peace Theory** (DPT) He states that the spread of democracy makes the elimination of war possible. The belief in freedom of the individual and the idea that democratic peoples will treat each other ethically is at the heart of his theory. Fukuyama (1992) and Amrit Sen (2011) also shares similar ideas about democratic states having peace with their neighbours. Thus, Kant gave the theoretical work and Doyle put it into test through the empiricism by highlighting that liberal democracies have not waged war against each other.

Structural Functionalism has been one of the most used paradigm among scholars conducting qualitative research. It is based upon the analogy of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Marlownski. Weber ; each of them putting forward the proposition that, society works like an human body where each part is playing its role. Durkheim was more interested in knowing how societies are bonded together and his social theory highlights that in order to understand this bondage it is important to understand the institutions of a society. To him, societies have passed through the cultural bondage of tribe and clan into the organic societies where everyone feels important. Max Weber , theorizes on how the society transitioned and to him this modernization occurs due to charismatic leadership and ideas , these can be ideological or religious based. A strong government in a modernized society acts in a bureaucratic manner

thus everything is followed according to written rules. *Both Marx and Weber recognised that order is often imposed by powerful groups using resources such as the police, the military and various means of ideological control.* (Lovesya,2014, Stolley,2005).

Constitution of a state by itself is a manifesto of structural functionalism, wars occur when either the constitution fails to check the deterioration of the structure or the constitution by itself allows such venture without the approval of the public. Thus , in case of CARs their political and military institutions prevented an outbreak of war among them. If the constitution, of any of the republic allows a role or domination of the military then this variable can affect peace. Thus the theoretical framework employs two constructs namely the war and ideological control in theoretical plane. These constructs have been operationalized into variables of military and constitution into the empirical plane.

Critical Theory (CT) is both a theory and a paradigm, It questions narratives given by colonialists; in our academic world almost all theories have their origin from the colonial powers. CT focuses on the value and understanding of respective cultures and history. In proposed theoretical framework, CT is the overall umbrella, specifically the role of history and historicism, the narrative of constitutionalism.

Proposition. When ideological control weakens in a state then there are less chances of peace.

Hypothesis.

A constitution that allows military to dominate other institutions often paves way to war.

Methodology

Due to the nature of the subject, a hybrid methodology will be employed with bias on interpretivism, supported by positivist data. The primary data in the form of constitutions of CARs is the base of positivism and their interpretation will be carried out on the basis of philosophical works. Constitutions of CARs reflect their political ideology and the system of government, it is through the study, analysis and interpretation of these constitutions that an inference will be drawn.

Part III. Summary of Theory

Theory is a general explanation of an event and this conclusion is reached after a mental process which undergoes specific scientific criteria . First and foremost is the idea or the Constructs, they are philosophical in nature and are also known as axiom. A relationship must be established among the constructs and thus a proposition will emerge

In Step II, the constructs are reduced to measureable qualities known as variables. and a relationship of cause and effect must be established between them known as hypothesis.

In Step III, the hypothesis must be tested repeatedly, even if it failed , still it adds knowledge .

In Step IV. The entire process has to be explained and this explanatory power has to be based upon logic, rationality, with key assumptions, and limitations. The end result or inference is known as Theory.

Conclusion.

There is no univocal answer to the question, "What does social theory mean? (Kivisto,2021). Despite the debate on the etymology of theory among scholars, there seems to be a unity among them on its utility in research. Theory provides a lens to focus on the subject; a feminist approach will have a different theoretical perspective than a functionalist approach on the same very subject under research. Theory provides a logical explanation of an event by establishing the relationship between variables, the cause and effect among them. In USA , in last century especially in post-World War II era , it rather became a paradigm among the scholars to churn out the theories purely basing upon data interpretation. It is another fact that despite the simplicity of the structure of a theory , there seems to be hardly any theory worth its name coming out of under developed countries specifically Pakistan.

One can have a theory on this very subject as why there are no theories being articulated by Pakistani scholars despite being eye witness to such global issues like War on Terror, Afghan refugees, political unrest and political stability , changing pattern of social life in villages and towns due to expatriate remittances; there seems to be an unending list of topics yet among Pakistani scholars there is a paradigm to use only western theories in local environments.

Assumptions or Axioms are the basic bricks of any theory and with this logic it is difficult to rationally accept that ; a western theory can be applied in eastern culture. Theoretical framework is given very little importance by the leading scholars like Babbie and Bhattacharjee, whereas it deserves to be given more weightage. A single theory cannot fully explain a phenomenon mainly due to key assumptions thus a triangulation of theories is more pertinent ; which in other words means theoretical framework.

Recommendation.

Peshawar University guidelines for MPhil and Ph.D. scholars for preparation of dissertation and thesis needs an review as it does not use the word ‘ theory’ even for once. In light of the importance of theory, a separate heading like ‘theoretical framework’ should be inserted.

Reference List

Abend, G. (2008). The Meaning of “Theory.” *Sociological Theory*, *26*(2), 173–199. Retrieved 22 June, 2024, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/20453103.

Adom, H, & Agyum,N.(2018) International Journal of scientific Research Volume-7 | Issue-1 | January-2018 | ISSN No 2277 - 8179 |

Adler,P.D., Gay,P.M., & Reed,M. (2014) (Eds.) *Oxford handbook of sociology, social theory, & organizational studies , contemporary current* . London: Oxford press.

Andersen,L.,& Logco, H. (2017) *Sociology the essentials* (9th ed.). Boston: Cengage.

Babbie, E. (2021).(15th ed.). *The practice of social research*. Boston: Cengage.

Bryman, A. (2012) *Social research methods* (4th ed.).New York: Oxford.

Bhattacherjee, A. (2012). Social science research: principles, methods and procedures.(2nd ed.). Florida: Orange.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundation of social research meaning and perspective in the research.* London: SAGE.

Doyle,M,W. (1983). Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs. *Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol. 12, No. 3* (Summer, 1983), pp. 205-235 http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265298?origin=JSTOR-pdf Accessed on July 17, 2024.

Fukuyama,F. (1992). *End of history and the last man standing*. NY: free press.

Garver,N. (2016) What theory is. In Haring, Lee (Ed.), *Grand theories in folkloristies.* Indiana University Press.

Hubbard, P. (2008). Twenty-Five Years of Theory in the CALICO Journal. *CALICO Journal*, *25*(3), 387–399. Retrieved 5 July, 2024, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/calicojournal.25.3.387

Joas, H., & Knobl,J. (2004). *Social theory, twenty introductory* lectures. Skinner,T. (Trans.)(2007)(7th reprint). Cambridge University Press.

Jaccard,J.,& Jacoby,J. (2020) *Theory construction and model building skills. A guide for social scientists*. (2nd ed.). London: Guilford press.

Kant.,I. (2003). *To Perpetual Peace*: Humphrey,T. (Trans.). Oxford University Press. (Original works published 1795).

Kivisto,P. (2021). (Ed.) *The Cambridge handbook of social theory. Vol II. contemporary theories and issue*. Cambridge University Press.

Lovesay, C. (2014). *Cambridge international As and A level sociology course book*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Parsons, T. (1938). The Role of Theory in Social Research. *American Sociological Review*, *3*(1), 13–20. Retrieved 7 July,2024 from https://doi.org/10.2307/2083507

Popper.,K. (2005). *Logic of scientific discovery*. London: Routledge. (Original works published in 1935).

Ritzer,G,.& Stepnisky, J. (Eds,).(2011) *Companion to major social theorists. classical social theorists*. (Vol 1.).Oxford:UK.

Scott,J. (2014). (4th ed.). *Dictionary of sociology*. London: Oxford.

Sen, A. (2011). (Ed.). *Peace and democratic society, Vol I, violence and civil society*. Cambridge: Openhouse Publishers.

Swedberg, R. (Ed.). (2014a). *Theorizing in social science the context of discovery*. California: Stanford University.

Swedberg, R. (2014). The Role of Theory. In *The Art of Social Theory* (STU-Student edition, pp. 169–187). Princeton University Press. Retrieved 6 July,2024, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wq0bc.11

The Sociology Book, big ideas simply explained. (2015). London: DK Penguin Publishing.

Stolley,K. (2005). *The basic of sociology*. London: Greenwood.

University of South California Theoretical Framework in research Theoretical Framework - Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper - Research Guides at University of Southern California (usc.edu)

Waltz, K . (1979). *Theories of International Relations*. Maine Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.